



# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## Watkins hasn't let arthritis get better of her

By FANNIE SUNSHINE  
The Champion

**B**ecause Jan Watkins can no longer keep her body active, she focuses her energy on keeping her mind healthy.

"With my satellite dish I can travel around the world."

The 67-year-old has been battling with rheumatoid arthritis for 17 years but hasn't let the disease get the better of her.

At the age of 50, Ms Watkins' life began to unravel before her eyes.

The one-time athletic cyclist awoke one morning and found it unbearable to get out of bed.

"I woke up one day and couldn't use my hands, my knees. I went to the doctor and a blood test showed I had an advance stage of rheumatoid arthritis, to which there's no cure. I didn't even know I had a problem. I was very athletic and sometimes I would have aches and pains so maybe there were signs and I just didn't know."

Six months after being diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, Ms Watkins went into full remission. That lasted three years.

"It came back worse than ever," she recalled. "It came back with a vengeance. It ripped right through me. What made it worse was that I looked the picture of health."

Eventually she had to quit her job as a technical chemist because the pain was so intolerable and the stairs were too hard to manage.

Although friends and family suggested time and time again she move out of the rural home in Milton she loved, Ms Watkins was determined to stay put.

"Because I can't move my shoulders I had trouble reaching things. So I invented ways to help myself do some of the things I used to be able to do."

Her inventions include using sticks with a rubber office finger on the end to push things (including her glasses when they fall down too far) and various hooks on the walls help her to get dressed.

"These aren't just things I feel like having like a vase of flowers. These are things I can't live without."

Ms Watkins demonstrated how the hooks help her to put on her skirts.

"I hang one end on one hook and the other end on another. Then instead of wrapping the skirt around myself, I wrap myself around the skirt."

And getting on and off her shoes is no longer an obstacle. By using binder rings

attached to the end of the Velcro strips, she uses her stick to move the rings to tighten or loosen the shoes.

The electronic wheelchair that sits in her kitchen isn't used anymore.

"I used to use it more but now I have two new hips," she said with a smile. "You can't get much worse than me. If I can manage, other people can."

In nine years, Ms Watkins has had more than 10 operations due to her arthritis.

"I had my knees replaced, toe joints removed, my wrists and ankles are fused up and I had both shoulders done. My neck is fused so I can't turn it and my jaw joints have slipped, pushing my jaw back. I hope it doesn't get so bad that I won't be able to talk or eat."

But having to face the reality of rheumatoid arthritis had made her a stronger person and she waves off any show of pity.

"I live a very happy, satisfying life because I've adapted. By building gadgets I'm solving "impossible" problems. I think of ways to get around it and then I invent something."

Some things she can't solve, like the constant pain and fatigue she must live with. And she had to hand in her driver's licence years ago.

Volunteers from the Canadian Red Cross Society and the March of Dimes pay her visits five mornings a week to help with cooking and cleaning.

And for the past six years, Ms Watkins has kept in touch with other sufferers of rheumatoid arthritis through her RAIV (Rheumatoid Arthritis In Ventors) reports.

"It's a small snail mail group of about 15 people. I send out quarterly reports about new inventions or new medicines. It's an information swapping support group."

It did take awhile for Ms Watkins to come to terms with her disease.

"I had a terrible attitude at first. Only when I changed my environment my attitude toward the disease changed."

In light of Arthritis Awareness Month, volunteers with the Milton branch of the Arthritis Society have begun a canvassing campaign.

It's estimated four million Canadian suffer from arthritis.

Between 1994 and 2001, the number of 54-year-olds diagnosed with arthritis will nearly double to 738,000 from 418,400.

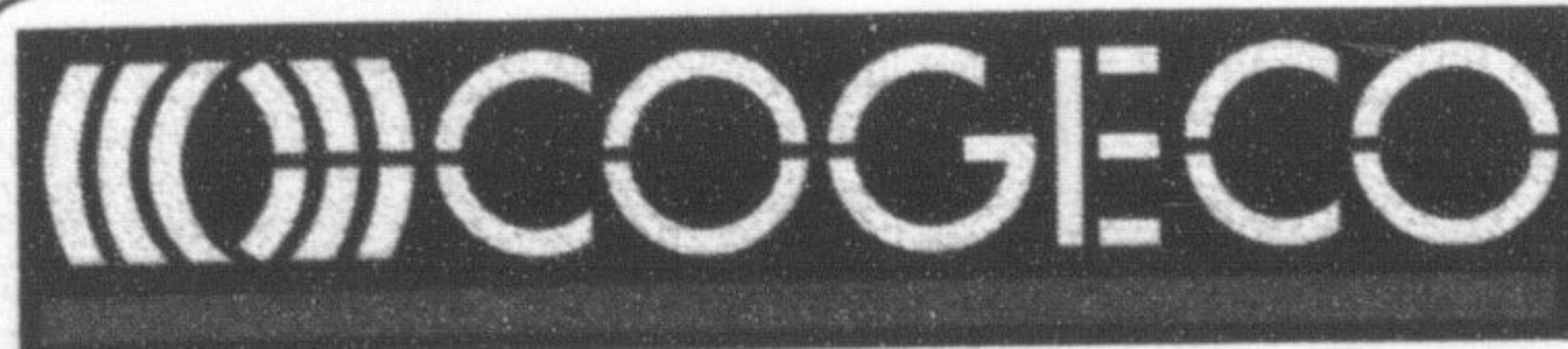
Juvenile arthritis (JA), also called childhood arthritis, affects an estimated one in 1,000 children under the age of 16.

For more information regarding Arthritis Awareness Month, call (905) 878-9151.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton's Jan Watkins, 67, has found inventive ways to cope with rheumatoid arthritis, which she was diagnosed with at age 50.



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### COGECO 14 Programming Schedule – September 11th - 17th, 2001.

Tuesday, September 11th	Wednesday, September 12th	Thursday, September 13th	Monday, September 17th
9am, 10am, 11am & Noon Plugged In! – Early Week Edition	9am, 10am, 11am & Noon Plugged In! – Early Week Edition	9am, 10am, 11am & Noon Plugged In! – Early Week Edition	9am, 10am, 11am & Noon Plugged In! – Late Week Edition
5pm & 6pm Plugged In! – Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm Plugged In! – Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm Plugged In! – Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm Plugged In! – Early Week Edition
5:30pm Osler Health Connection	5:30pm Quick & Easy Ways to Healthy Eating	5:30pm The Issue Is...	5:30pm Quick & Easy Ways to Healthy Eating
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo	6:30pm Juno Beach to Caen, Pt. 2	6:30pm Money Week	6:30pm Money Week
8:00pm Halton Hills Council, Sep 10th		7:00pm Osler Health Connection	7:00pm The Issue Is...

Feature this week: Optimist TV Bingo, Tuesday 6:30pm